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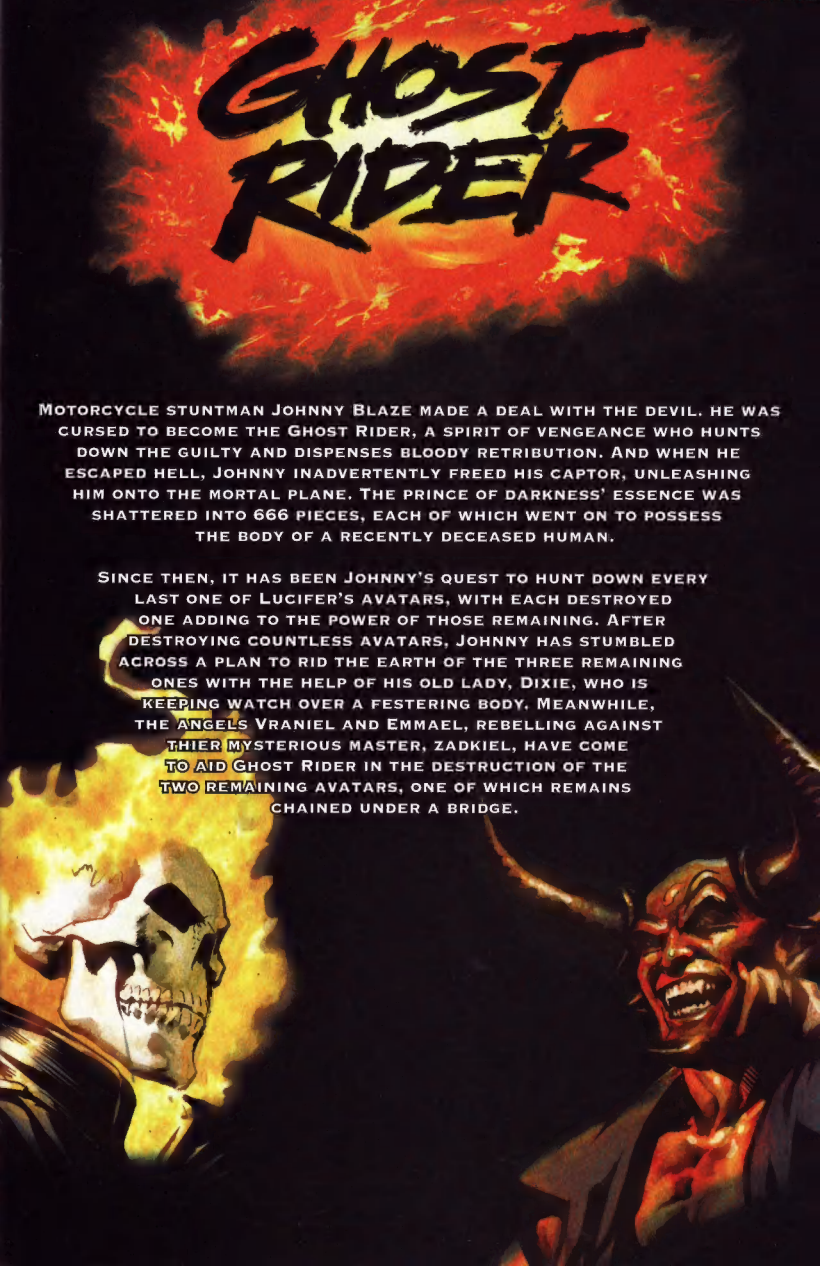
GHOST RIDER



Motorcycle stuntman Johnny Blaze made a deal with the devil. He was cursed to become the Ghost Rider, a spirit of vengeance who hunts down the guilty and dispenses bloody retribution. And when he escaped hell, Johnny inadvertently freed his captor, unleashing him onto the mortal plane. The prince of darkness' essence was shattered into 666 pieces, each of which went on to possess the body of a recently deceased human.

Since then, it has been Johnny's quest to hunt down every last one of Lucifer's avatars, with each destroyed one adding to the power of those remaining. After destroying countless avatars, Johnny has stumbled across a plan to rid the earth of the three remaining ones with the help of his old lady, Dixie, who is keeping watch over a festering body. Meanwhile, the angels Vraniel and Emmael, rebelling against thier mysterious master, Zadkiel, have come to aid Ghost Rider in the destruction of the two remaining avatars, one of which remains chained under a bridge.

HEY!
WHY HAVEN'T YOU BEEN ANSWERING YOUR PHONE? I'VE CALLED, LIKE, TEN TIMES!
I THOUGHT THE GHOST RIDER GOT YOU!
ANYWAY, NEVER MIND THAT.
I'M ALMOST READY TO GO, ON MY END...
OUT.
SLAM!
...THE IRANIANS DELIVERED THE EXPLOSIVES LAST NIGHT. ALL I HAVE TO DO IS TAKE THEM DOWN TO THE STADIUM AND--
HELLO--?
...
ARE YOU THERE?
NOT YET.

REVELATIONS PART 5

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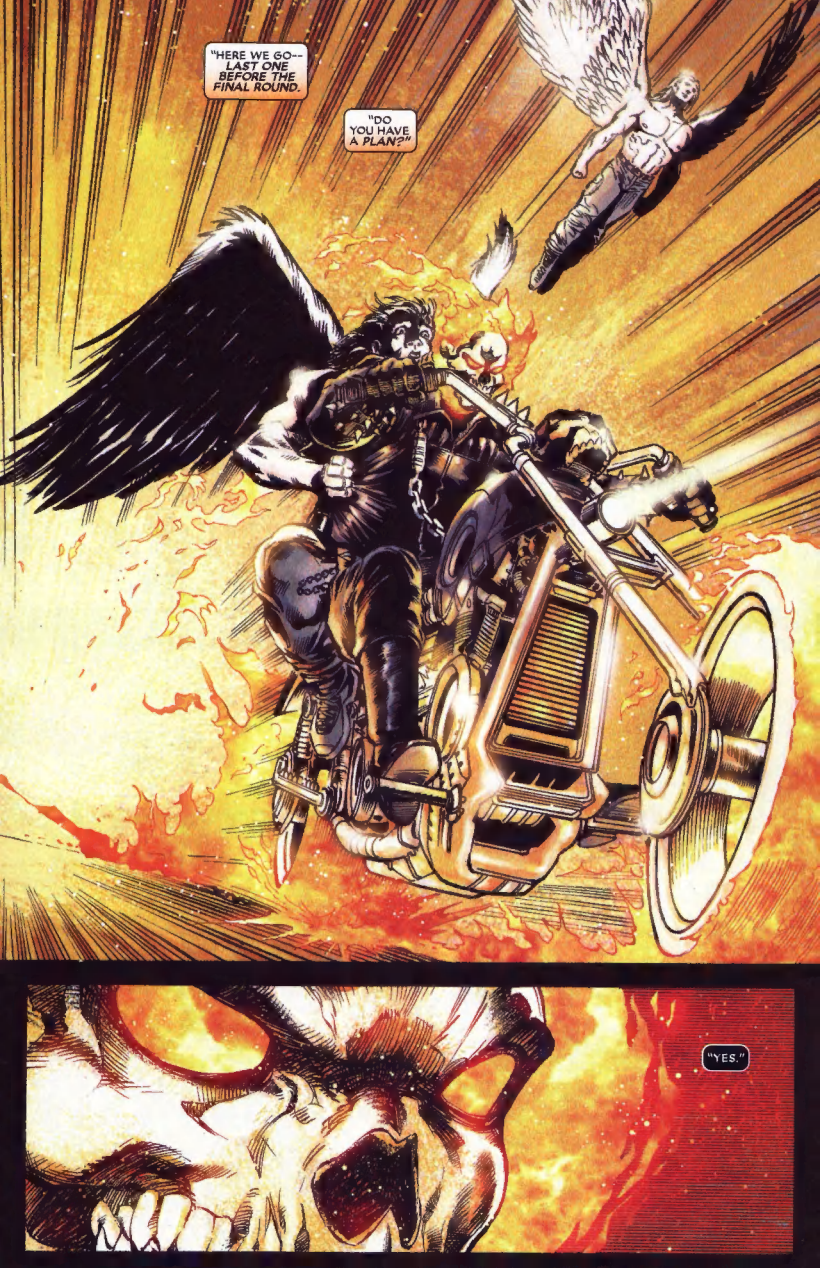
WAIT!
WE CAN HELP YOU!
I TOLD YOU--
WE WON'T GET IN YOUR WAY! PLEASE, ALLOW US THE HONOR OF JOINING YOU IN GLORIOUS BATTLE AGAINST LUCIFER'S INFERNAL MIGHT!
EMMAEL...?
I...
...I DON'T THINK I'M UP FOR ANY "GLORIOUS BATTLE"...
"THEY DID HELP US--THE LEAST WE COULD DO IS HELP THEM."
"WE DON'T HAVE TIME--!"
"AN' BESIDES...
"...THEY'RE ANGELS.
"ALWAYS GOOD TO HAVE THEM ON YOUR SIDE, RIGHT?"
GET ON.


"HERE WE GO-- LAST ONE BEFORE THE FINAL ROUND.
"DO YOU HAVE A PLAN?"
"YES."

OKAY.
SO...I'M NOT GOING TO HAVE TIME TO BLOW UP AN ENTIRE STADIUM FULL OF INNOCENT BYSTANDERS.
THAT'S FINE.
THAT'S JUST--
--GREAT!
KRAMMM!
BUT...
...I CAN BLOW UP EVERYONE IN THIS BUILDING.
OH, YES...
...THAT I CAN DO.

WEEE-OOOO-WEEE-OOOO-WEEE-OOOO-WEEE-OO
WHAT THE HELL...?!
HEY! WHAT IS THAT NOISE?
WEEE-OOOO WEEE-OO
LEVEL B
EXIT
FIRE ALARM!
EVERYBODY HAS TO GET OUTTA THE BUILDING!
"FIRE ALARM", HUH?
GEE...
...I WONDER WHERE THE "FIRE" IS?

BEHIND YOU.
SKRRAAAKK!!
YYAAAAIIIEEEEE!

ISN'T THERE...SOMEONE ELSE YOU CAN PICK ON?!
THERE IS ONLY YOU...
...AND ONE OTHER.
REALLY?
THERE'S ONLY...?
OKAY, WELL--WHY NOT GO AFTER THAT ONE?
HEY!
STAY AWAY FROM ME! I'M WARNING YOU, I'LL--
YOU'LL BLOW UP THE BUILDING?
YES!
I WILL BLOW UP THE BUILDING!
THERE IS NO ONE LEFT INSIDE--IT WOULD BE POINTLESS.
THEN I'LL DO IT--I'LL DO IT JUST TO DO IT!
I'LL DO IT TO DRIVE INSURANCE RATES UP!
YOU'RE BLUFFING. YOU WON'T DO IT.
BECAUSE THAT WOULD BE SUICIDE.
A SIN THAT WOULD DAMN YOU TO HELL.
AGAIN.

?%#$!
CH-CHUNGK!
TAK!
I, HOWEVER...
...CAN--
PREPARE, PIT-DWELLER...
CHAK!

...TO FACE YOUR JUDGMENT!
WHAT THE--?
THE LORD'S WRATH IS--
UPON YOU...
VRANIEL...?
IDIOTS! I TOLD YOU TO REMAIN--
OH, HO! BROUGHT SOME FRIENDS, HUH?
THEY ARE NOT...MY "FRIENDS"
OH, SURE THEY ARE--WITH ALL THAT YOU THREE HAVE IN COMMON? HOW COULD YOU NOT BE FRIENDS?
SILENCE!
WHAT'S THE MATTER, EMMAEL? AFRAID I'LL SAY SOMETHING--?
RRRAAAAAHHH!

THOUGHT SO.
YOU REALLY SHOULD TELL HIM, EMMAEL. THAT IS--
WWHHHIIIIIFFF!
WRROOKK!
--UNLESS YOU WANT ME TO.
CHANK!
TELL ME...
CH-CHANK!
...WHAT?

OH, ALLOW ME...
HE LIES!
HE IS THE PRINCE OF LIES!
HEY, DON'T TAKE MY WORD FOR IT--SEE FOR YOURSELF WITH THAT PENANCE STARE OF YOURS!
IF HE'S LYIN'...HE'S FRYIN'!
TELL ME.
I'M-- I AM AN INNOCENT!
THEN YOU HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR.

FWASH!

...?
KINDA *MIND-BLOWING*, ISN'T IT?
TO FIND OUT, AFTER *ALL THESE* YEARS, THAT YOU...

...ARE AN ANGEL?

WHEN YOU OFFERED UP YOUR SOUL TO ME, YEAH--I TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION. BUT SO DID THEY.
EMMAEL, VRANIEL... AND THEIR BOSS--
ZADKIEL.
AND IT WAS YOUR OLD LADY, ROXANNE, WHO OPENED THE DOOR FOR THEM.
"SHE PRAYED AND PRAYED AND, MIRACULOUSLY, THOSE PRAYERS WERE ANSWERED...
"...BUT NOT IN ANY WAY SHE COULD'VE POSSIBLY EXPECTED.
"OR BY WHOM SHE WAS EXPECTING."
IT IS DONE.
"IT WASN'T GOD WHO ANSWERED ROXANNE'S PRAYERS...
"IT WAS ZADKIEL!"

"AND YOU, JOHNNY-CAKES... YOU WERE CURSED ALL THE SAME..."
...YOUR DASHING GOOD LOOKS NOT-WITHSTANDING.

YOUR SOUL IS MINE, JOHNNY BLAZE... THAT'S A DONE DEAL. BUT THEY MANAGED TO THROW A WRENCH INTO THE WORKS AND RUIN THAT DEAL BY BINDING YOU WITH THE GHOST RIDER, AN ENTITY OF HEAVEN
AND THAT, I CAN'T TAKE TO HELL.
AT LEAST, NOT TO KEEP.
"WHEN YOU, UH... DIED, YOUR SOUL CAME TO ME--AND WITH IT, THE GHOST RIDER.
"OF COURSE I KNEW THE ARRANGEMENT WAS TEMPORARY. I ALWAYS KNEW THAT YOU'D ESCAPE-- I WAS COUNTING ON HITCHING A RIDE.
"THAT'S WHY I HATED YOU IT, EVERY SINGLE DAY. I SO WANTED TO JUST TELL YOU THAT THERE WAS NOTHING AZRAEL YOU THERE--BUT YOU WOULDN'T HAVE BELIEVED ME.
"SO I HAD TO WAIT FOR YOU TO FIGURE IT OUT YOURSELF-- WHICH WOULD'VE TAKEN AN ETERNITY...
"...HAD YOU NOT COME ACROSS GREEXIX.
"THAT, BY THE WAY, WAS A COMPLETELY UNPLANNED OCCURRENCE. I HAD NO IDEA THAT GREEXIX HAD ACTUALLY FOUND A WAY OUT. ONCE I, AH...
"... 'TALKED' TO HIM, THOUGH, HE FILLED ME IN ON THE DETAILS. AFTER THAT, ALL I HAD TO DO WAS SIMPLY ASSUME MY FORM...

"...AND WAIT FOR YOU TO SHOW UP.
"...YOU REALLY HAD NO CLUE?
"IT NEVER SEEMED ODD TO YOU THAT A DEMON WOULD SPEND ALL OF HIS TIME CHASING DOWN AND FRYING BAD GUYS?"
DO NOT MOCK ME.
HEY, WHOA-- I'M NOT LOOKING TO PICK A FIGHT HERE...
...AFTER ALL, YOU SEE THE FIRE THAT RAINS DOWN FROM HEAVEN, YOU ARE THE WRATH OF GOD.
YOU ARE
AND I'M NOT THE ONE WHO DID IT TO YOU.

I... AM SO SORRY...
PLEASE... FORGIVE ME...
SO. YOU WANNA FINISH HIM OFF...
FK-SSHH!
...OR DO YOU WANT ME TO?
THERE IS...NO NEED...
FWASSHH!
DAMN.
THE LITTLE ANGELIC B$%## SHOWED ME UP.

RELAX!
LOOK, HEAVEN STUCK IT TO YOU JUST LIKE THEY DID ME. WHEN I WARRED WITH HEAVEN, IT WAS ZADKIEL WHO SOLD ME OUT--I THOUGHT HE WAS MY FRIEND.
WHEN IT WAS ALL OVER, BECAUSE OF HIS PREVIOUS ALLIANCE WITH ME, HE AND HIS SUBORDINATES WERE NO LONGER ALLOWED TO SERVE IN THE CHOIR. INSTEAD, THEY WERE TO SERVE AS A...A KINDA "BLACK OPS" SQUAD, COMPLETELY OFF THE BOOKS.
OR... "BOOK".
AND YOU--YOU ARE THEIR HEAVY ARTILLERY--THEIR "BOOGEYMAN".
"IF YOU SIN, THE GHOST RIDER IS GONNA GET YOU!"
ANYWAY, WHAT I'M SAYING IS THAT THOSE A-HOLES CHOSE TO BE WHAT THEY ARE--YOU WEREN'T GIVEN A CHOICE.
SO, HERE'S MY OFFER:
WE FORM AN ALLIANCE.
TOGETHER, WE'LL TAKE OUT THE ONE OTHER REMAINING VESSEL, THEREBY CONSOLIDATING MY POWER HERE ON THIS PLANE. ONCE THAT'S DONE, WE'LL LAUNCH A TWO-PRONGED ASSAULT ON HEAVEN...
...AND MAKE 'EM PAY FOR WHAT THEY DID TO US.

GHOST WRITERS

Now THAT'S what I call a revelation! For the past year and a half, this is what we've been building up to, and if you ask me, it paid off in spades. This changes everything you THOUGHT you knew about the Ghost Rider, as well as everything going forward. I know you're all probably stunned into silence, so let's move right into the mail:

Dear Ghost Writers,

I first started reading GHOST RIDER in the 90's with the Dan Ketch version. Up until then my favorite characters had been Punisher and the Hulk. But growing up in a household of Harleys, AC/DC and Clint Eastwood movies, as soon as I saw GR I was hooked! His look, his attitude, the dark tone of the artwork was all perfect. Javier and Tex freakin' kicked ass!

Then this fellow Johnny Blaze appeared in the story. So I looked more into this "original" Ghost Rider and I found that I liked his origin even more. I was thrilled to see ol' Flamehead become a more prominent figure in the Marvel Universe meeting up with the likes of Wolverine, Spidey, Captain America, and the Punisher (always my favorite team-up). Even the cyberpunk GHOST RIDER 2099 was cool.

But then the Ketch Rider changed (anime!?) and sort of faded out. I was bummed!

Fast forward to last year. Ghost Rider Returns! ROAD TO DAMNATION **and** the movie…Johnny Blaze with the Dan Ketch look!? Javier and Tex on a new regular book!? Holy crap! I thought my **own** head would burst into flame! And all of these projects were great! My hero was back (yes, with a vengeance… groan) and hopefully headed back into the mainstream with the other Marvel heavy hitters.

I love this new take on the Devil's Bounty Hunter idea and the 666 shards. His meeting with the Hulk was very cool (especially those last few pages) although it does seem like there's a gap between issues 13 and 14. And I really like the return to Johnny and GR not always seeing eye to eye on things. I always loved that struggle in the Blaze version. So I just wanted to say thinks for bringing Ghost Rider back! I'm along for the ride wherever you're going!

Dale "Crash" Griffitts
Galesburg, IL

P.S. By the way, any chance of a new Punisher/Ghost Rider team-up? I'd be interested to see how Frank and Johnny got along. Especially with all the events after Civil War. Anyway, thanks for listening and I hope you enjoy my drawing (PLEASE, PLEASE print it!).

Hey Crash!

Great work on the fan-art. Sorry we had to crop it a little bit, but I wanted to leave some room for at least one other letter. It thrills me to the (flaming!) bone that we've been able to keep all you old school GR fans happy—due in no small part to the work of our incredible art teams. This month it's GR fan-fave, Javier Saltares, legendary inker Tom Palmer, and the inimitable Dan Brown on colors.

Great idea about Frank and Johnny—sounds like chocolate and peanut-butter to me. We just need to find the right story…

Dear Ghost Writers,

I've been reading GHOST RIDER for longer than I can remember and I just finished reading issue #16. This is what I've always wanted from GHOST RIDER: a real supernatural story. I mean, any of the supers can go around beating the crap out of criminals or super bad-guys, but I don't think there're many that can actually take on the devil.

I'm really glad we're back to the real story after that pointless Hulk crossover. We didn't even get to see Ghostie kick his ass--that was a rip-off. But a few issues back into the main story and he's already punched off a Lucifer-zombie's head and then blown him up with some kind of Ghost Rider hadouken. I wanna see more of Ghost Rider proper smashing up these zombies. Maybe I'm just a gore hound, who knows. I think the amount of adult content in this comic is spot-on. Too many of the super hero comics these days are dumbing it down. I mean most of the main characters are adults after all.

Well, anyway that's all I've got to say--this is the first letter I've written to a letters page but I just felt compelled to because I've been enjoying the comic so much.

Keep the skull fires burnin'.

Jim Thompson
Portsmouth U.K

Jim,

Sorry you didn't like the WORLD WAR HULK crossover—those were some of my favorite issues so far. Even though it came out as a draw, I thought both those guys got some pretty good licks in.

I'm really glad you're enjoying the current arc though—not only is there a whole lot of crazy violence, but also the earth-shattering reveal just a handful of pages back. That's right, kiddies—it was neither a mistake nor a hoax, your beloved Johnny Blaze is in fact…an angel. I know it probably hurts your head to think about it at first, but the more you sit with it, the more you'll learn to love it as much as we do.

Tune in next month for the ultimate showdown between Johnny and Lucifer—it's gonna be a big 'un, and I guarantee it won't end like you expect it to.

Also, if you're internet-savvy, you've already heard about the new team we have coming to GHOST RIDER with issue 20. We're going to be welcoming aboard the fantastic Jason Aaron, writer of the upcoming Wolverine arc with the stunning Roland Boschi on art. These guys are going to be running with all the new stuff spinning out of this very issue, but more about that next month!

Vroooom!
Aubrey

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DO WE HAVE A DEAL?
I NEED TO MAKE A PHONE CALL FIRST.
A... WHAT?!
JOHNNY? JOHNNY, IS THAT YOU?
YOU'RE ACTUALLY MAKING A PHONE CALL IN THE MIDDLE OF YOUR BIG DRAMATIC DECISION?!
LOOK, THE GREASY MOTEL OWNER GUY IS GONNA KICK ME OUT--HE'S ALREADY CALLED THE COPS!
I'M...I THINK I'M ACTUALLY INSULTED!
DIXIE. ONE HOUR.
BUT JOHNNY, I DON'T--
CLICK
OKAY, SO...ARE YOU DONE NOW?
DO WE HAVE A DEAL?
OF COURSE...

BOOP!
...NOT.
AFTERMATH!
To Be Concluded...